

As I said, I like virtually all of them, as they all accomplish the purpose of restraining the reckless deficits that our generation has produced; but in drafting an amendment to guide not only this generation but all of those to follow, I would hope that we would do as the Constitutional Convention would have done had it had the benefit of Jefferson's wise counsel: to set down the general principle only and allow future generations, with their own insights into their own challenges, to put it to practical effect.

VOTING RIGHTS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. ELLISON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. ELLISON. Mr. Speaker, the right to vote is under attack. It may not be easy to see; but in State legislatures all across this country, we are seeing a quiet passing of laws that will strip American citizens of their right to vote.

It may come as a surprise that this is happening in the United States. Our great country is best known for its rich democratic tradition, which is predicated on the right to vote; and this right to vote has been expanding over time, not retracting. Throughout our history, brave men and women have fought and died for the right, and it has been denied to too many Americans for too long. Since its founding, the United States has been on a course toward enfranchisement, not disenfranchisement. Incredibly, that seems to be changing.

State legislatures are turning back the clock on decades of hard-fought voter protections. This year, 34 State legislatures introduced prohibitive voter ID bills. If passed, they could affect the voting ability of nearly 21 million Americans. Two States have enacted prohibitive proof-of-citizenship laws, which stand to exclude even more voters at the polls; 13 States are working to make it harder to register to vote; and nine are working to reduce early and absentee voting.

These laws add up to the greatest attack on voting rights since the Jim Crow era. In all, they could strip more than 5 million Americans of the right to vote. That figure alone is half the margin of victory from the 2008 Presidential election. Congress must act. Today, I am introducing two bills to push back against these laws and protect Americans' right to vote.

The first bill, the Voter Access Protection Act, will ensure that no American citizen is denied the right to vote because they don't have photo IDs on election day. The second bill, the Same Day Registration Act, will allow Americans to register to vote on the same day they cast their ballots. No American citizen should be turned back at the polls because they didn't register weeks or months in advance. These bills will help ensure that all Americans are able to exercise their fundamental rights in Federal elections.

If you truly believe in democracy, you should be doing everything you can to increase the enfranchisement of American citizens, not to take it away. I urge all of my colleagues to support this critical and patriotic legislation.

DOMESTIC ENERGY PRODUCTION IS THE SOLUTION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. THOMPSON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, rural Pennsylvania, like other parts of the country, have not been immune to difficult economic times; but today Pennsylvania is uniquely positioned to become a source of growth and strength for our State, the region, and the Nation through the development of what could be one of the world's largest natural gas fields, the Marcellus shale, much of which is located in my congressional district.

Marcellus production is offering our region and the country expanded access to clean, reliable, and affordable energy—and a new source of economic growth and stable jobs.

As Congress tackles challenges regarding jobs and the deficit, we must consider domestic energy production as a logical and obtainable solution to both of these challenges, for the United States has enormous untapped deposits of coal, oil, natural gas, and other sources of energy that can offer good-paying jobs, new sources of revenue, affordable and reliable energy, as well as national energy security.

The economic success story of the Marcellus shale can be replicated across this country by opening up all of America's domestic resources and allowing new investment and technologies to expand the exploration and production of America's own resources.

We can develop these resources, create jobs and tens of billions of dollars in revenues, but only if the Federal Government encourages and not discourages production. I'm not talking about a Solyndra-style subsidy but, rather, government's getting out of the way of accessing the natural resources that God has blessed us with.

PRISONER TORTURE IN AFGHANISTAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) for 5 minutes.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago, I spoke in this Chamber about the U.N. report that outlined, in gruesome detail, prisoner abuse at detention facilities in Afghanistan—inmates beaten with electrical wires, hung from their wrists, and much worse. Now additional reporting by The Washington Post has revealed that U.S. officials knew for some time about this torture of prisoners by Afghan security forces.

So what did our top people in Afghanistan do about these warnings? Apparently, not a thing.

For years our Special Operations forces and CIA officials had been in and out of these prisons—dropping off detainees, meeting with Afghan authorities, taking advantage of the intelligence gathered there. We paid to rebuild one prison with the cold and chilling name Department 124, which sits behind a concrete fortress near U.S. military headquarters in Kabul.

It would be hard—actually, it would be impossible—to miss what was going on inside those walls; but for a long time, it was ignored—nothing said, no meaningful oversight exerted. It wasn't until a few months ago, when the U.N. made it clear they were releasing a report detailing the torture, that our military commanders suddenly took notice and stopped sending prisoners to these facilities. In a flash, they instituted a monitoring program and human rights training.

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It's embarrassing, Mr. Speaker. But it seems like our leadership was more concerned about public relations damage control than adherence to human rights norms and international law.

The American people have sacrificed a lot for this war. And in return, they've been fed a lot of high-minded assurances that we're doing important work that advances American values. The name of this mission is Operation Enduring Freedom, but apparently we're not practicing what we preach in Afghanistan because torture has no place in free society, no place in a campaign that professes to be about human dignity and the rule of law.

At a time when we're considering major cuts right here at home in life-saving domestic programs so that we can get our fiscal house in order, how can we possibly justify spending billions of dollars every week on a military occupation that seems to be promoting and encouraging torture? We cannot wash our hands of this. We cannot avoid responsibility because this is happening on our watch.

Torture, whether we're practicing it ourselves or just tacitly condoning it, isn't just reprehensible; it's bad national security policy as well. It represents the United States of America in the worst possible light and is surely a great recruitment tool for the terrorists. When it comes to international affairs, the greatest currency we have is our moral authority, but we continue to waste it by acting like outlaws instead of the greatest superpower on Earth.

Mr. Speaker, the time has come. It is time we had a national security approach that showcases the very best of America, one that demonstrates our decency and compassion, one that emphasizes diplomacy and reconciliation, one that puts civilian and humanitarian experts on the ground instead of 100,000 troops with guns.

You don't need to invade a country to prove that America is strong or to keep America safe. That's the heart of my SMART security plan that I have been talking about for many years now. We've tried belligerence. We've tried force. And over the last decade—well, actually, we've tried all of this forever, and it just has not worked.

It's time, Mr. Speaker, for this war to end. It's time to implement a SMART security platform. It is time now, Mr. Speaker.

HONORING AMERICAN HERO LANCE CORPORAL JUSTIN GAERTNER

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida (Mr. NUGENT) for 5 minutes.

Mr. NUGENT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor a great son of Trinity, Florida, Corporal Justin Gaertner of the United States Marine Corps First Combat Engineer Battalion. I have had the honor of getting to know Justin over the past year, Mr. Speaker, and I would like to share his story.

After being deployed to Afghanistan, Justin took on one of the most dangerous jobs there is in the Marine Corps. He was the lead sweeper, clearing roads of IEDs in advance of U.S. vehicles.

On November 26, 2010, Justin's unit was traveling with an eight-truck convoy. One of the trucks struck an IED. Following the explosion, one of Justin's good friends, Corporal Gabriel Martinez, lost both of his legs in a second IED attack while he rushed to aid that downed vehicle. Justin desperately wanted to help his friend, but his responsibility was to continue the mission, to continue to sweep for IEDs to ensure the safety of the rest of the convoy. It was during the sweep that a third IED was remotely detonated as Justin had just entered that area. The explosion propelled Justin into the air and took both of his legs and severely injured one of his arms. Justin paid a terrible price that day while helping to protect fellow marines.

When I first met Justin at Walter Reed Army Hospital in January of this year, he was more concerned about his brother marines that were still in country than he was about his own safety. He wanted to return to that company of marines to help ensure the safety of his fellow marines that were still left in Afghanistan. That's what heroes do. He's since made an incredible recovery while at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, but that was with the help of dedicated medical staff, the support of his mother and his family and of fellow marines. Justin is getting stronger every day.

When I first met Justin in January of this year, he told me one of his future goals was to compete in a marathon. Today I'm proud to announce that this past weekend, less than 1 year since he was wounded in combat, Justin completed the 2011 Marine Corps Marathon

in the hand crank division in 2 hours, 50 minutes, and 39 seconds. Justin and his family have been an inspiration to me and make us all proud to be Americans because of their sacrifice on the battlefield.

On behalf of a grateful Nation, I want to take this opportunity to again thank Justin for his bravery and his sacrifice on behalf of his Nation. And I want to thank all the troops that have been in harm's way, that have volunteered to protect this great Nation at great risk to themselves.

SHADES OF GREEN

IN HONOR OF AN AMERICAN HERO, LANCE CORPORAL JUSTIN GAERTNER, 1ST COMBAT ENGINEER BATTALION, THE UNITED STATES MARINES

Shades . . .

Shades of Green . . .

On battlefields of honor bright . . .

There are but all of those who but bring their most magnificent light . . .

As Brilliant, as brilliant . . . as any seen in this sight!

All in their Magnificent Shades of Green!

For these are but, The United States Marines!

Such men of might, who over evil do all in the darkest fights!

Rushing into the face of death, as they are seen!

Oh yes, to be a United States Marine!

To but wear so proudly, those most Magnificent Shades of Green!

As it was in battle . . . All in that fight . . .

When a Combat Engineer, with nerves of steel . . . Named Justin so appeared . . .

The kind of men who have no fear!

As Justin, walked through the Valley of Death . . . out on attack . . .

When, an IED . . . Almost took his life . . .

While, all in that moment of death or light . . . his fine heart grew even greater in sight!

And on that next day as he awoke . . . as his heart to him so spoke . . .

So spoke to him, as tears rolled down his face . . .

As he so realized, the full nature of what had took place . . .

But, this Strong Son of the South . . . would not so give up now . . .

Wiping the tears from his face, shining even brighter on that day!

All in those Shades of Green . . . as his new battle was under way!

As they took his legs, and most of his arm . . . but not take his heart that day!

As something so told him deep inside, get up and start running now . . .

As with his great heart, his first new steps he found!

To find the faith and courage to so move onward now!

Because Marines Do! And Marines Win!

And failure was not an option, to any of them!

As one of Florida's brightest sons,

He said to himself, I will stand and I will run!

Pity get out of the way, I've got miles to go before I'm done!

Justin time, as his brave heart so began to run!

Taking him to even greater places and heights where mere men have never gone!

Because Marines climb mountains

Marines climb walls . . .

Marines always stand tall!

As there you go Justin, running to recovery!

Oh what a discovery, an even brighter Shade of Green!

As Justin You Will Teach Us . . .

As Justin, You Will So Beseech Us . . .

As it's so deep down in our hearts Justin, that you will reach us!

All in what your life means!

And if I had a son, I wish he could so shine half as bright as this one!

All in his most magnificent Shades of Green!

As one day too Justin, up in heaven you will be seen!

As an Angel, all because of how you so wore and so carried yourself . . .

All in those most magnificent Shades of Green!

Ooo . . . Rah!

RECOGNIZING THE IMPORTANCE OF LABOR UNIONS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PAYNE) for 5 minutes.

Mr. PAYNE. Mr. Speaker, nearly 25 million Americans are currently unemployed or underemployed; yet despite this disparaging rate, efforts to strengthen the workforce are being derailed by special interest attacks on the middle class and workers. In Wisconsin, Governor Scott Walker has taken away nearly all collective bargaining rights from the majority of the State's public employees.

An Ohio referendum on State Senate Bill 5 aims to strip public workers of collective bargaining rights. For the 4 years prior to the enactment of Ohio's collective bargaining law, the State led the Nation in safety forces work stoppages. When the city and its safety forces had a dispute concerning wages, working conditions, and adequate staffing, there was no way to resolve the dispute. That is why the collective bargaining law was passed. And the law has worked. There have been no safety forces work stoppages in Ohio since the law was passed.

Only through collective bargaining do American workers still have a voice. Still, this right is being attacked.

The New Jersey Statehouse passed a bill destroying the right of public sector unions to collectively bargain over health care and pension issues. These efforts to turn back the clock on public safety and on those who protect and serve are unacceptable.

Today I rise in support of the workers of Wisconsin; I rise in support of the workers of Ohio; I rise in support of the workers of my home State of New Jersey. I rise today in support of the millions of Americans who stand as proud union members seeking fair labor treatment and a fair shot at the American Dream.

I have been protected by unions. I worked as a truck driver; I worked as a teacher; I worked on the docks of Newark; I worked as a waiter; I worked in the breweries of Newark—all of them protected by strong unions. And that's what helped me get through college and helped me get to the United States Congress.

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Today, I stand with 99 of my House colleagues to speak on H. Res. 452,